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ABSTRACT

This report provides the results of a study designed to assess the type of student who chooses to enroll at Boise State University (BSU) in Idaho and what these students experience during their first semester. It is based upon information available from school records for 1,497 Fall 1995 first-time-in-college students who indicated that they were degree-seeking and were enrolled in an academic program, supplemented by a survey given to students in the First Year Experience Seminar and several sections of an Introduction to Psychology course. The study found that BSU's freshman class was fairly reflective of other freshman classes around the country, though only 72 percent of the students indicated that they actually planned to get a degree from BSU. Popular majors included general business, elementary education, psychology, criminal justice, and nursing. At the end of the first semester about 65 percent of freshmen had a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher, and 90 percent of this group re-enrolled in the spring semester. For students with a first semester GPA of less than 2.0, only 66 percent returned. An appendix contains a copy of the student survey. (MDM)

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Who are Our Students and What are Their First Semester Experiences? A Look at Fall 1995 New Freshmen

Research Report 97-01

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Boise State University
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Who are Our Students and What are Their First Semester Experiences? A Look at Fall 1995 New Freshmen

ABSTRACT

This report provides a picture of who chooses to enroll at Boise State University and what these students experience during their first semester. It is based upon information available in computerized records and was supplemented with a survey given to enrollees in GE 197 (First YES) and P 101 (Introduction to Psychology). It is limited to the 1,497 first-time-in-college students who indicated they were degree-seeking and enrolled in an academic program.

The following are some highlights from the report:

- Boise State University's freshman class was fairly reflective of other freshman classes around the country. More than half were female and over three-quarters were under the age of 20. ACT and SAT scores were close to the national average, and over 60% had high school GPAs above 3.0.

- Only 72% of new students actually planned to get a degree from Boise State University. There were 202 students (or 13%) who were undecided about a major upon entry. Popular majors included General Business (140), Elementary Education (89), Psychology (58), Criminal Justice (54), and Nursing (53).

- Freshman financed their education through financial aid (about 50%) and working at least part-time (60%).

- Most students took an English course their first semester. Almost 1200 students enrolled in an English course compared to about 550 in Mathematics and 750 in Introduction to Psychology. Students rated writing skills as the area where they'd improved most their first

semester. About 75% indicated Boise State University had a major or moderate impact in this area.

- Most students used a variety of services their first semester. High on the list were the library (90% using), academic advising (81%), food services (72%), and financial aid (69%). Satisfaction ranged from a high of 84% for the library to a low of 45% for food services.

- Few students were totally isolated on campus. Almost everyone surveyed talked to other students and over 90% had talked to a faculty member at least once. Over 75% had worked with other students outside of class on a project, and over 60% met as a member of study group their first semester.

- At the end of their first semester, about 65% of freshman had a grade point average of 2.0 or greater; 90% of this group re-enrolled in the spring. For students with a first semester GPA of less than 2.0, however, only 66% returned.

These data will form the basis for two follow-up studies on retention. One will assess the specific impacts of the cluster program and First YES course on student knowledge and use of resources, perceptions of the University, grade point average, and, of course, continued enrollment. The second will look generally look at what predicts continued enrollment at Boise State University.

Who are Our Students and What are Their First Semester Experiences? A Look at Fall 1995 New Freshmen

One of the issues currently facing Boise State University is how to deal with improving student retention. Over the past five years, about 80% of new fall freshman return in the spring. The following fall, about 55% are there. Though it is difficult to get comparable data for other institutions, these figures are generally quite low when compared to other four-year public universities with modest admissions requirements.

In the fall of 1995, several new initiatives were undertaken to improve the retention of freshmen. One was a cluster program where students were encouraged to enroll in a group of courses so that they would see the same students in most of their classes, thereby encouraging more social contact and support among cluster group members. A second effort was an orientation course entitled "First Year Experiences Seminar" or "First YES," designed to improve student study skills and knowledge of the University and its resources. Efforts are underway to look at the effects of these initiatives. It is important, however, to first gain an understanding of who comes to Boise State University so that we can better understand these retention efforts and their impacts.

This report provides a picture of who chooses to enroll at Boise State University and what their perceptions are of their first semester experiences. The report is based upon the information Fall 1995 freshmen provided at admission and was supplemented with a survey given to enrollees in GE 197 (First YES course) and several sections of P 101 (Introduction to Psychology) at the beginning and end of the Fall 1995 term. It is limited to the 1,497 Fall 1995 first-time-in-college students who indicated that they were degree-seeking and were enrolled in an academic program.

This report presents an overview of the freshman experience and will be followed by two other reports which answer the questions of what predicts student retention and what impact the First Yes Course and Cluster program have had on enrollees. Specifically, the following questions will be answered in this study:

- Who are BSU's first-time-in-college students? What are their demographic characteristics?
- What academic backgrounds do these students bring to Boise State University?
- Why did these students come to Boise State University? What are their educational goals? What are their majors?
- What financial arrangements have students made for paying for their education? How many are working while going to school?
- What factors do students see initially as helping or hindering their success at Boise State University? Do they feel academically prepared? Do they see themselves as being able to plan their time and stay motivated?
- In which courses do freshmen begin their college careers? Do all freshmen begin by taking general education core courses their first term?
- What impact does Boise State University have on new freshmen their first semester in terms of educational outcomes such as defining and solving problems and recognizing and using effective written communication skills? What do they say they have learned?
- What services do they use their first semester and how satisfied are they with them?
- What is their general experience with the Boise State University community? Do they experience good teaching? Are they able to interact with faculty and other students and begin to feel a part of the Boise State University community? What do they think Boise State University should do differently to help students continue to enroll at Boise State University?
- How well did they do their first semester? What is their grade point average (GPA)? Do they return for another semester?

These questions will be addressed in the sections that follow. Copies of the surveys can be found in Appendix A.

Demographics of BSU's first-time-in-college students

As Table 1 shows, BSU's Fall 1995 freshman class was fairly reflective of other freshman classes around the country. More than half the student body was female and over three-quarters were

under the age of 20, enrolling at Boise State University right out of high school. Most of BSU's freshmen were in-state residents, and over 60% lived locally in Ada or Canyon counties.

Table 1
Demographics of New Fall 1995 Freshman

Percentage Who Were:	
Female	54.8
Under 20	77.1
White Non-Hispanic	85.8
In-State Students	89.5
From Ada & Canyon County	60.7
Enrolled Full Time (12 or more credits)	59.5
Living on-campus	36.7*
Living with parents	36.4*
Caring for Child or Parents	11.7*
* Estimated from survey responses	

About 60% started at Boise State University by enrolling full-time (though other research has shown that only about 10% probably will maintain the pattern of enrolling full-time for every major semester in the next four years). The new freshmen were fairly evenly divided in their living arrangements between living on campus, residing with their parents, or maintaining their own apartment or house. About one in eight provided care for children or elderly parents.

By comparison, the total group of Boise State University undergraduate degree-seeking students was less traditional. Using Fall 1996 data, only 20% were under the age of 20 (compared to 77% of freshmen). Most (57%) were female, and 66% of the undergraduates were enrolled for 12 or more hours, figures fairly close to the freshmen proportions.

Academic background

In order to be admitted to Boise State University, all high school graduates under the age of 21 are required to submit their high school grades and test scores on either the SAT or ACT. Older students need only submit their high school transcript or GED scores. As shown by Table 2, over

80% of new freshmen had either SAT or ACT scores. Most students had ACT scores (68.5%) while 23% had SAT scores and 10% had both.

Table 2
Admissions Tests Taken by
Fall 1995 New Freshman

Test	*Frequency*	*Percent*
No Test	272	18.2
ACT only	876	58.5
SAT only	200	13.4
Both ACT and SAT	149	10.0
Total	1497	100.0

Table 3 displays the mean test scores for new freshmen. The average combined ACT score was 20.9 but ranged from 11 to 33, about the same as the national average. The average combined SAT score was 918 but ranged from 580 to 1420, also close to the national average. In general, Boise State University students appeared to have somewhat higher math than English scores.

Table 3
Mean Test Scores of New Fall 1995 Freshman

Test	*N*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*Minimum Score*	*Maximum Score*
ACT Combined	1025	20.93	3.66	11	33
ACT English	1025	20.32	4.51	6	36
ACT Math	1025	19.50	3.86	6	32
ACT Reading	1025	21.89	5.34	6	36
ACT Science	1025	21.47	3.86	11	34
SAT Combined	349	918.45	168.93	580	1420
SAT Math	349	481.71	96.89	290	730
SAT Verbal	349	436.73	93.61	210	710

Boise State University has a policy that requires students with scores below a certain level to enroll in developmental writing (E 010) and/or mathematics review (M 012 or M 020) before taking college-level courses. In English, an ACT percentile score below 20 or an SAT verbal score below 335 indicates a need for developmental writing. In mathematics, the cuts are higher. Depending upon the desired course, students need ACT scores of 20-21 or SAT scores of 530-550 (or take a test given by the department). These convert into percentile scores of between 58 and 65. The difference in required cut scores is easily seen in reviewing Table 4. In general, only about 12% of new freshmen needed English compared to 70% who needed math. Many students, however, retest using another mathematics test, so these percentages may be misleading.

Table 4
New Freshman Who Are Below Cut for Remedial English and Math Using ACT or SAT Scores

	Number	*Percent*
English	151	12.3
Mathematics*	852	69.5

As indicated by an average high school grade point average (GPA) of 3.13, most students presented good grades from high school. Over 60% had GPAs of 3.0 or better and 90% had GPAs over 2.5 (see Table 5).

Based upon test scores and high school grades and courses, students are assigned an admissions status. Most (62%) were given a regular admissions status. Another 24% were provisionally admitted. Most were in the provisional group because they had not taken all of the courses included in the Idaho College Admission Core. About 5%, however, were provisional because they had a general equivalency diploma (GED) and 1% because they appealed the initial decision to deny them admission and were admitted. About 13% were conditionally admitted while the University awaits their official high school transcripts (as opposed to the unofficial copy used to make admissions decisions). See Table 6 for full details.

Table 5

High School Grade Point Averages of Fall 1995 Freshman

High School GPA	*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Cumulative Frequency*	*Cumulative Percent*
Under 2.0	6	0.5	6	0.5
2.0 - 2.49	132	9.9	138	10.4
2.5 - 2.99	370	27.8	508	38.2
3.0 - 3.49	475	35.7	983	73.9
3.5 and up	347	26.1	1330	100.0

Table 6
Admissions Status of New Freshman

STATUS	*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Cumulative Frequency*	*Cumulative Percent*
regular	935	62.5	935	62.5
conditional	193	12.9	1128	75.4
probationary	3	0.2	1131	75.6
N/A	11	0.7	1142	76.3
provisional 1 (lacks all of HS core)	251	16.8	1393	93.1
provisional 2 (has GED)	83	5.5	1476	98.6
provisional 3 (admitted after appeal)	21	1.4	1497	100.0

Colleges and Majors

The largest group of new degree-seekers (about one-third) began by enrolling in the College of Arts and Sciences. Even after subtracting the 202 students who were undecided about a major and therefore automatically assigned to Arts and Sciences, the enrollment was larger for this college than any other (see Table 7). The next most popular college was Business, followed closely by Health Sciences, then the College of Social Science and Public Affairs. About 10% enrolled in the College of Education, while about 5% picked the School of Engineering Technology. Table 8 contains more information about the majors chosen within each college. Note that students enrolled in vocational/technical programs are not included.

Table 7
College of Major for New Fall 1995 Freshman

COLLEGE	*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Cumulative Frequency*	*Cumulative Percent*
Arts & Sciences	517	34.5	517	34.5
SSPA	230	15.4	747	49.9
Business	269	18.0	1016	67.9
Education	160	10.7	1176	78.6
Engineering	82	5.5	1258	84.0
Health Science	239	16.0	1497	100.0

In the College of Arts and Sciences the most popular major was "General/Undecided" followed by Computer Science in a distant second place. In the College of Social Science and Public Affairs almost half of the majors were in either Psychology or Criminal Justice. In Business, over half of their new students began without declaring a specific major. In Education, over half were in Elementary Education. Health Sciences majors selected Nursing followed by Pre-Med.

Reasons for enrolling at Boise State University

We have assumed that being degree-seeking naturally means that one was seeking a degree from Boise State University. Survey results indicate, however, that this is not necessarily the case.

Table 8
College and Major Selected by New Fall 1995 Freshman

College of Arts & Sciences		
Major	*Frequency*	*Percent*
General/Arts Sciences	202	39.1
Pre Forestry Wildlife Mgt.	22	4.3
Pre Architecture	25	4.8
Biology	23	4.4
Biology Secondary	5	1.0
Art	31	6.0
Music Performance	5	1.0
Music/General	9	1.7
Theatre Arts	3	0.6
Advertising Design	7	1.4
Graphic Design	15	2.9
Illustration	3	0.6
Theatre Arts Dir.	1	0.2
Art Secondary Education	6	1.2
Music Sec Education	22	4.3
Theatre Arts Secondary	12	2.3
Music Theory/Com	3	0.6
Music/Business Office	2	0.4
French	3	0.6
German	3	0.6
Spanish	1	0.2
German Sec Education	1	0.2
French Sec Education	2	0.4
English/Liberal	1	0.2
Philosophy	2	0.4
English/Sec Education	14	2.7
English General	6	1.2
English/Gen American	1	0.2
English/Gen Writing	1	0.2
English/Technical	2	0.4
Mathematics	6	1.2
Mathematics/Sec	7	1.4
Computer Science	43	8.3
Physics	3	0.6
Chemistry	7	1.4
Chemistry, Biochemistry Emphasis	4	0.8
Geology	5	1
Geophysics	1	0.2
Earth Science Ed	4	0.8
Chemistry Secondary	1	0.2
Interdisciplinary	3	0.6
Total	517	100

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Table 8 - Cont'd.

College of Social Science and Public Affairs		
Major	*Frequency*	*Percent*
Gen Soc Sci Public Affairs	12	5.2
Communication	12	5.2
Mass Commu/Journalism	13	5.7
Communication Secondary Ed.	2	0.9
Psychology	58	25.2
Social Work	20	8.7
Criminal Justice	54	23.5
Social Science	5	2.2
Anthropology	6	2.6
History	8	3.5
Political Science	15	6.5
Sociology	3	1.3
Social Science Public Affairs Option	1	0.4
Social Science Liberal Arts Option	1	0.4
History/Sec. Education	12	5.2
Poli Science/Social Science	2	0.9
Sociology Social Science Sec. Ed.	3	1.3
History/Social Science	2	0.9
Communication/English	1	0.4
Total	230	100

College of Business		
Major	*Frequency*	*Percent*
General Business	140	52.0
Accounting	48	17.8
Finance	6	2.2
Marketing	18	6.7
International Business	21	7.8
Mgmt/Human Resources	2	0.7
Production Operations Mgt.	3	1.1
Mgmt/Entrepren.	6	2.2
Computer Information	21	7.8
Business Economics	2	0.7
Econ International	2	0.7
Total	269	100

Table 8 - Cont'd.

College of Education		
Major	*Frequency*	*Percent*
General/Education	26	16.3
Elementary Education	89	55.6
Physical Educ/No	4	2.5
Phys Ed Non Teac	3	1.9
Physical Education	16	10
Athletic Training	15	9.4
PE Non Teach Opt	3	1.9
Elem Ed Biling/M	4	2.5
Total	160	100

School of Engineering Technology		
Major	*Frequency*	*Percent*
Engineering	14	17.1
Chem Engineer (UI Coop. Program)	6	7.3
Civil Engineer (UI Coop. Program)	9	11
Electric Engnr (UI Coop. Program)	17	20.7
Mech Engineer(UI Coop. Program)	13	15.9
Computer Eng (UI Coop. Program)	7	8.5
Construction Management	16	19.5
Total	82	100

College of Health Science		
Major	*Frequency*	*Percent*
General/Health Science	7	2.9
Health Sciences	4	1.7
Nursing (4 yr)	53	22.2
Pre Dental	7	2.9
Pre Medical Student	42	17.6
Medical Technology	2	0.8
Pre Occupational	6	2.5
Pre Pharmacy	10	4.2
Pre Dental Hygiene	13	5.4
Environmental Health	2	0.8
Pre Veterinary Medicine	8	3.3
Pre Chiropractic	8	3.3
Radiologic Technology	15	6.3
Pre Physical Therapy	34	14.2
Health Data Mgt	4	1.7
Respiratory Therapy	5	2.1
Pre Dietetics	1	0.4
Nursing (2 yr)	14	5.9
Medical Records	2	0.8
Pre Physician Assistant	2	0.8
Total	239	100

Only slightly more than 70% of degree-seekers indicated that they were seeking a degree at Boise State University (see Table 9). About 20% planned to transfer. The remainder had the short-term goals of attending for personal enrichment, upgrading their job skills or completing a few courses before taking time off (e.g., to do mission work).

Table 9
Reasons for Enrolling at BSU
Based on Survey of New Fall 1995 Freshman

Reason	*Frequency*	*Percent*
Earn Degree	227	71.6
Take Courses Before Transfer	56	17.7
Begin then Take Time Off (e.g., missions)	7	2.2
Upgrade Job Skills	10	3.2
Personal Enrichment	17	5.4

When asked by survey what they hoped to obtain from their education at Boise State University, only about 30% of the responses involved wanting a degree. (Note, however that a student could indicate multiple goals since the question was open-ended.) Other common answers included beginning a financially successful career (22.5%) and increased understanding and knowledge (19%). See Figure 1 for details.

Financial arrangements

College is an increasingly expensive proposition, and many students worry about how they will afford an education. One common way, of course, is to work while going to school. As shown by Table 10, over half (59%) of new freshmen were working when they began school and one in eight (12%) were working full-time.

About half of new freshmen received some form of financial aid their first semester. Over 30% had taken out an educational loan, and slightly less had received a grant such as a Pell Award. See Table 11 for further details.

What New Freshman Hoped to Obtain from their Education at BSU

Category	Number	Percent
Obtain Degree	160	30%
Start on Financially Successful Career	118	22%
Increased Knowledge	100	19%
Personal Fulfullment	55	10%
Job Skills	42	8%
Transfer Credits	30	6%
Personal Enjoyment	20	4%
	525	100%

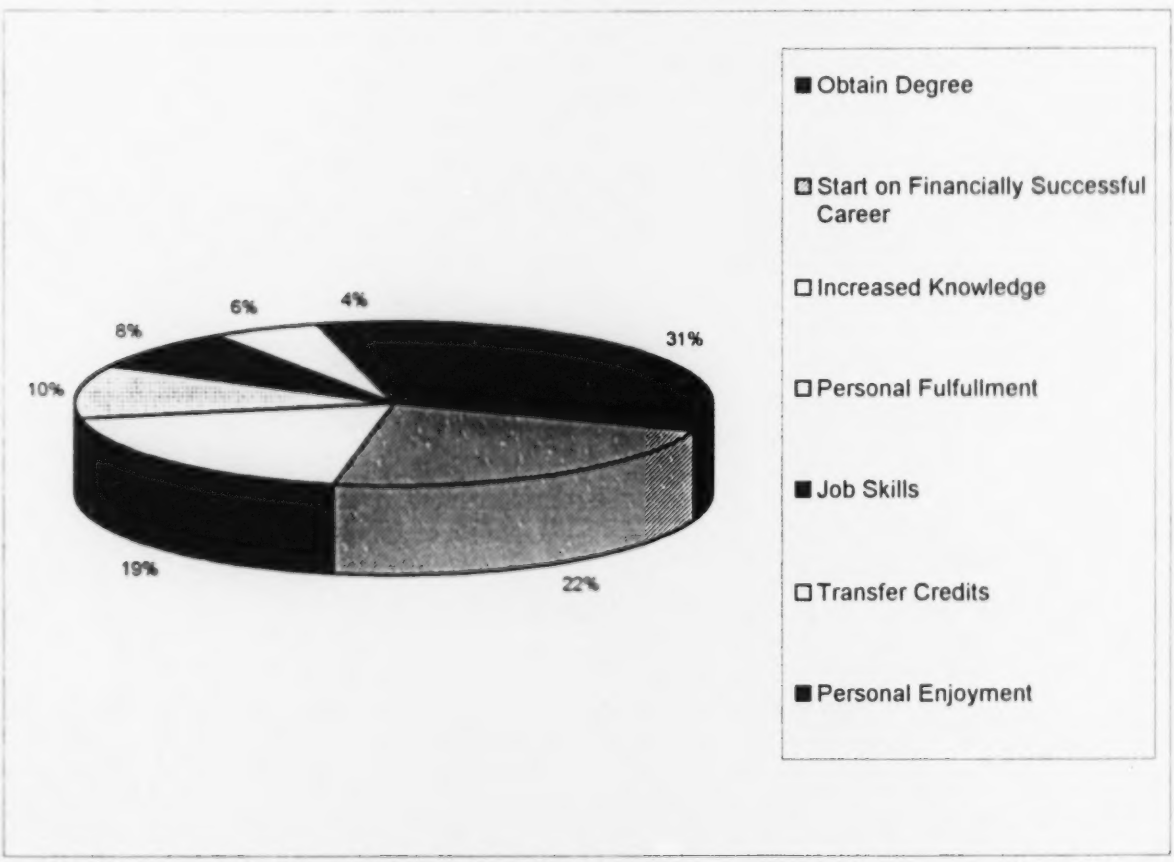

Figure 1. Categories of Student Responses to the Question "What do you hope to obtain from your education at BSU?"

Table 10
Number of Hours Worked While in School
Based on Survey of New Fall 1995 Freshman

Hours Worked	*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Cumulative Frequency*	*Cumulative Percent*
None	128	40.9	128	40.9
Less than 20 Hrs.	71	22.7	199	63.6
Between half & Full Time	78	24.9	277	88.5
Full-time	36	11.5	313	100.0

Table 11
Financial Aid Given to New Fall 1995 Freshmen
Their First Term

Form of Aid	*Number Receiving*	*Percent Receiving*
Scholarship	239	16.0
Loan	470	31.4
Grant	418	27.9
Fee Waiver	22	1.5
Any Aid	756	50.5

Student perceptions of factors which could help or hinder their success

As part of the beginning-of-the-term survey, students were asked to rate each of 18 factors as (1) a major hindrance, (2) a minor hindrance, (3) of some help, or (4) of great help. Table 12 contains the survey results. The factors were ranked based on their mean response where "4" symbolized "great help." Freshmen thought that the support of their family and friends to get an education would be most helpful. This was followed by their ability to think and reason and their mental and physical health as most helpful factors. Areas which students thought would present

the most problems were their financial resources and their approach to test-taking. In both cases, however, around two-thirds still thought of these factors as helps rather than hindrances. In general, therefore, students were quite positive about their situation.

Table 12
Students' Perceptions of Factors which Could Help or Hinder Academic Success
Based on Survey of New Fall 1995 Freshman

Factor	*Mean*	*Percent Perceiving as a Help*
Support of family & friends to get education	3.44	88.9
Ability to think & reason	3.39	92.7
Mental & physical health	3.39	87.6
Lack of motivation	3.32	84.8
Knowing what I want from my education	3.26	82.8
Ability to relate to others	3.25	83.6
Reading skills	3.21	80.8
Maturity/age	3.19	86.2
Academic background	3.15	77.4
Writing skills	3.13	78.2
Ability to plan & manage time	3.10	73.7
Amount of time able to devote to school	3.07	73.0
Love of learning	3.05	77.1
Ability to find & make use of BSU's resources	3.04	74.8
Note taking skills	3.02	71.5
Ability to memorize	2.94	73.7
Approach to test taking	2.93	68.9
Financial resources	2.86	65.7

First term course enrollment

Students are typically advised to take at least one core course their first term, and almost all students heeded that advice. Only 36 or 2.5% of freshmen were not enrolled in at least one core course. In addition, almost one-fourth of the freshman class chose to take *only* core courses their first term. These findings are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13
Number of Core and Non-Core Courses New Fall 1995 Freshman Took Their First Semester

# of Courses	*Core*		*Non-Core*	
	N	%	*N*	%
0	36	2.5	353	24.4
1	167	11.5	494	34.1
2	266	18.4	304	21.0
3	499	34.5	146	10.1
4	411	28.4	81	5.6
5 or more	58	4.7	69	4.9

Courses that had an enrollment of at least 75 (or 5% of the freshman class) are shown in Table 14. Most of the courses were general education core courses. However, a significant number of freshman began their college careers by enrolling in developmental English (N=91) or mathematics (N=222). In addition, over 300 students elected to take a course their first semester that would help orient them to the University. Over 100 students enrolled in GE 108 and over 200 enrolled in GE 197 (known as First YES). Other non-core courses with high freshman enrollments included FA 165 (weight training) and IS 101 (computer applications).

Boise State University first-semester impact

Prior research with students who had graduated from Boise State University indicated that graduates felt the University had impacted them most in improving their writing ability (see research report 96-02). Evidently this starts early since most freshman also thought Boise State University had especially impacted on their writing skills. Indeed, as shown by Table 15, 30% indicated that Boise State University had a "major impact" in this area, and over 75% thought the impact was either major or moderate.

In second place was helping students make a lifelong commitment to learning. In this area, 22% thought the University had a major impact and 75% indicated it was either major or moderate. The place where students thought that Boise State University had the least impact was in the area

Table 14
Courses taken by at Least 5 Percent of New Fall 1995 Freshmen
During their First Term

Course	*Enrollment*	*Course*	*Enrollment*
AR103	248	HY151	76
CM111	306	IS101*	77
E010*	91	M020*	222
E101	947	M105	116
E102	80	M108	133
E111	80	M111	87
FA165*	114	MU133	76
GE108*	106	P101	757
GE197*	210	SO101	100
HY101	96	TA107	152
		Z111	128
*Not a core course			

of learning about career options. Still, 22% indicated the University had a major impact and 64% indicated it was either major or moderate.

Students also talked about what they had learned when responding to the question "What is the most important thing you learned this semester?" as part of the end-of-the-term survey. Most responses (71%) indicated that students found their first semester a time of increased self-awareness about who they were and what they needed to do to survive and be successful in college. One major theme under this area was learning what it meant to be a college student. As one student noted, "I am a freshman, so I basically learned how to be a college student living on her own. How to deal with things and take care of myself was very important." Other comments that fell under this category included comparing college to high school. One student found out "that you have to work harder in college than you did in high school," as did many others.

Table 15

Perceived Impact BSU Had on Educational Outcomes First Semester

		Percent Who Thought Impact Was			
Outcome	***Mean***	***Major***	***Moderate***	***Minor***	***None***
Using Effective Written Skills	1.98	30.1	45.9	20.2	3.8
Making Lifelong Commitment to Learning	2.07	22.3	52.7	21.2	3.8
Using Effective Oral Communication	2.11	24.4	45.7	24.4	5.5
Developing Skills Employers Need	2.13	25.8	41.9	26.1	6.2
Analyzing: Drawing Conclusions from Data	2.14	21.7	46.2	28.6	3.4
Getting Along with people from various cultures, races, backgrounds	2.16	26.0	42.5	20.9	10.6
Defining & Solving Problems	2.18	13.7	56.7	27.8	1.7
Learning about career options	2.24	21.6	42.8	25.3	10.3

Another theme was learning generally how to be successful in college. On student noted that s/he had learned "that higher education is very important. I am the only person in this entire world who can give me an education, and I'm a lot stronger person than I thought I was." Another student indicated that s/he had found that "preparation is the key to success."

Others talked more specifically about the need to study and/or to organize themselves and manage their time. One student learned to "get organized fast and don't think the professors will slow down. Keep on top of everything and always attend class." Another added "you have to study all the time to get good grades." Another "learned to prioritize my life and to use that to help me plan."

A final group indicated that they had learned about themselves as learners. One student wrote: "I

learned that I like learning new things. It's one thing to read a book or do work because you have to. But it's another to want to learn more." Another wrote, "After a 15-year break in school I had to relearn how to learn and structure my own time to fit around my needs." Added a third, "Learning is great!"

The remaining comments in the self-learning section were more idiosyncratic. For example, one student learning to be "able to adjust with other people who were hard-headed." Another wrote, "I've learned that there are many services available for me. I've also learned that college is not as frightening as I thought it was." Another "...learned that it is important to feel comfortable with your instructors at the beginning of the semester."

Of the remaining comments, 11% dealt specifically with the institution and especially the resources that were available, 9% with academic content (e.g., English, communication, mathematics), 3% with learning about careers or majors, and 6% with miscellaneous other comments. The breakdown of the categories can be found in Figure 2.

Services use and satisfaction

The end-of-the-term survey also asked for information on which of 16 services students had used their first semester. It was not surprising to find, for example, that over 90% of new students used the library and course registration. About 80% said they used academic advising and two-thirds dealt with the financial aid office. Many students involved themselves in the campus by attending social activities (44%), getting tutoring (29%) or using recreational programs and services (39%). See Table 16 for further details.

Students were most satisfied with the library and with the recreational and intramural programs and services (see Table 16). In both cases, about 80% had indicated they were satisfied. Students were also fairly satisfied with student health services with about 70% indicating they were satisfied. Students were least satisfied with day care services with only 20% indicating they were satisfied. Because of the non-specificity of the item, however, responses may have indicated

Category	No of Comments	Percent
Self Learning	**285**	**71%**
Being a college student	*57*	*14%*
Learning to be successful	*57*	*14%*
Study Skills	*56*	*14%*
Organization & Time Management	*47*	*12%*
Other	*46*	*11%*
Learning about learning	*22*	*5%*
Instruction/Instructors	**44**	**11%**
Academic Subject Matter	**35**	**9%**
Careers/Majors	**14**	**3%**
Miscellaneous	**23**	**6%**
Total	401	100%

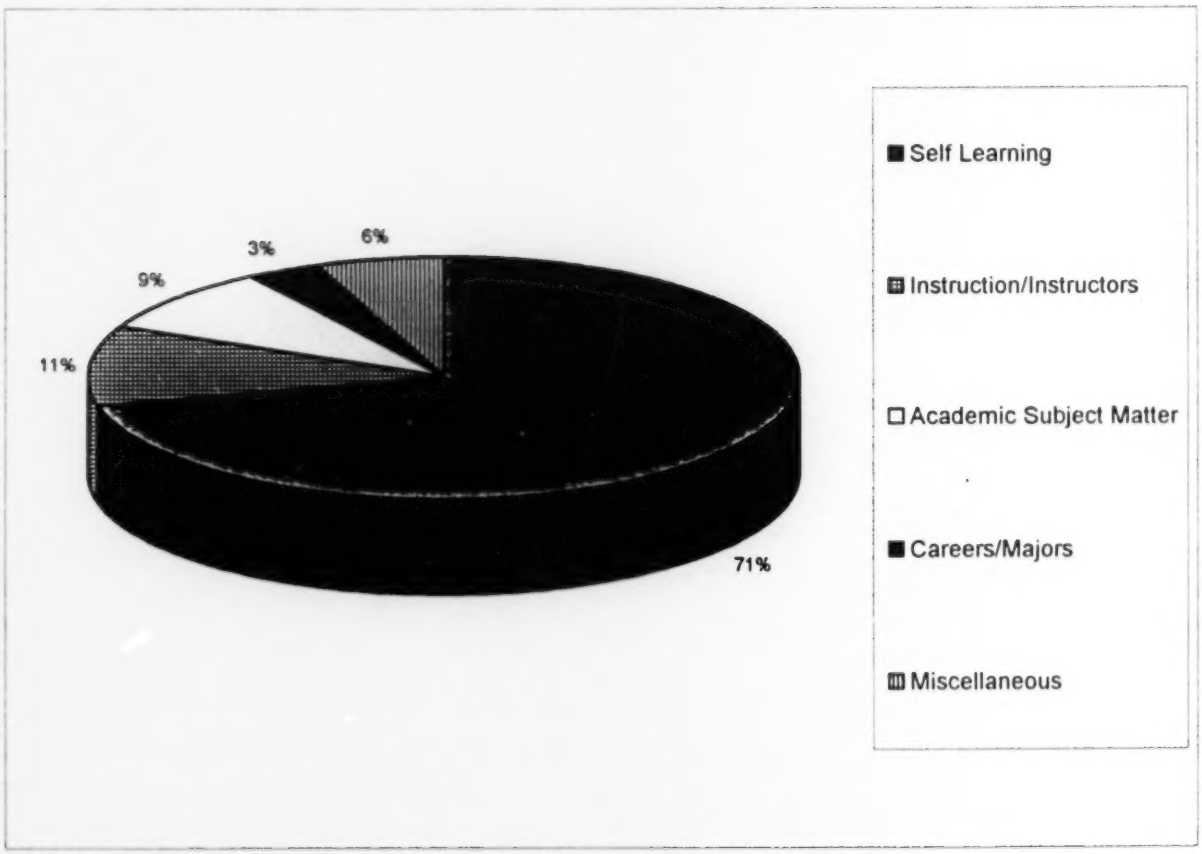

Figure 2. Response to the Question, "What is the most important thing you learned this semester?"

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dissatisfaction with off-campus child care as much as the service Boise State University offers.

Table 16
Student Use and Satisfaction with Services
Based on Survey of Fall 1995 Freshman

Service	*Percent Using*	*Percent Satisfied*	*Mean Rating*
Course Registration	95.7	61.4	2.45
Library	90.4	83.5	1.88
Academic Advising	80.9	64.0	2.26
Food Services	72.0	44.8	2.78
Financial Aid	68.8	58.8	2.36
Campus Newspapers	59.8	67.3	2.13
Residence Hall and Apts.	47.9	63.0	2.35
Social Activities	44.3	72.0	2.11
Health Services	40.8	70.4	2.00
Recreational Programs	38.6	80.0	1.88
Student Employment	32.4	52.7	2.33
Tutorial Service	29.4	71.1	2.13
Cultural Programs & Activities	24.1	60.3	2.31
Counseling Service	23.8	64.2	2.25
Honors Program	13.1	37.8	2.68
Day Care	10.3	20.7	2.98

Also, less than half were satisfied with food services (44% satisfied) and the honors program (38% satisfied). Note that about 10% indicated they had used day care and 13% used the honors program, while more than 70% used food services.

First term experiences and perceptions

How did students feel about Boise State University at the end of their first term? Most felt pretty good, it seemed from students' survey responses. Over 85% agreed that they had generally

experienced good teaching, while more than 70% agreed that the University's environment was warm and friendly and that staff had been helpful. Fewer thought that the faculty were genuinely interested in the welfare of students with about 60% agreeing that this was the case. All in all, about two-thirds were convinced that they had made the right decision in choosing Boise State University and 88% indicated that they planned to re-enroll next semester. See Table 17 for more details.

Table 17

Fall 1995 Freshman Perceptions of BSU's Environment

	Percent Who				
Item	*Strongly Agree*	*Agree*	*No Opinion*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
BSU's environment is warm and friendly	18.4	54.3	19.5	6.5	1.4
I am convinced I made the right decision in choosing BSU	25.9	41.3	25.3	5.8	1.7
Faculty members are genuinely interested in the welfare of students	13.0	48.5	28.7	7.8	2.0
Staff members have been helpful to me	16.8	55 5	18.8	6.5	2.4
I generally experienced good teaching this semester	28.3	58.0	9.9	2.7	1.0
I plan to re-enroll next semester	56.3	32.4	3.1	3.4	4.8

One factor that most theorists and researchers believe is important when students make a decision about re-enrolling is how socially and academically integrated they are within the institution.

Students who have made friendships, interacted with faculty, and participated in campus events are often more likely to continue at the college. To try to get an early indicator of integration for Boise State University students, freshmen were asked a series of six questions on the end-of-the-term survey. The questions and results can be found in Table 18.

Findings indicate that most students were at least somewhat socially integrated, despite the fact that many were commuters students. Over 90% indicated that they had held a conversation with

a faculty member. Over 40% had done so four or more times, while over 20% had held seven or more conversations.

Table 18
Students' First-Term Social Experiences

	Percent Who Experienced It				
Item	*Never*	*Once*	*2-3*	*4-6*	*7 or More Times*
Held a conversation with a faculty member	6.8	15.7	36.1	19.3	22.2
Held a conversation with another student	0.4	2.1	3.9	5.0	88.7
Worked with other students outside of class on a project	23.4	15.2	28.0	12.8	20.6
Met as a member of a study group	36.2	16.7	23.0	11.0	13.1
Felt lost or alone on campus	42.6	23.4	17.0	5.7	11.3
Experienced rudeness on campus	44.7	19.9	21.3	6.4	7.8

Students were also talking to each other. Only one respondent indicated that he/she had never held a conversation with another student, while almost 90% had held seven or more conversations.

Forming groups, especially study groups, has been shown to be one particularly effective way to get students integrated both socially and academically within the campus. Over 75% of new freshmen indicated that they had worked on a project with others their first semester, and over 60% had met as part of a study group.

Students also generally had very good experiences getting around campus. Only one-third had felt lost or alone on campus more than once. Over half, however, had experienced rudeness on campus at least once. For about 35%, this behavior occurred more than once during the semester. Again, see Table 18 for details.

Suggested changes to help students re-enroll

At the end of the survey, students were asked to indicate what Boise State University should do

differently to help students continue to enroll at the University. Their responses were placed into 12 general categories. The largest category were responses which indicated that everything was fine or the student felt s/he lacked knowledge about what should be improved. The categories of registration assistance and making the University a more student-oriented place were the next largest categories. Under registration, several students mentioned getting phone registration in place and making the process more understandable. One student counseled, "Fix your archaic registration process."

Responses that were categorized as making Boise State University more student-oriented mostly related to uncaring faculty or rude staff in administrative offices or the bookstore. One student wrote, "People that work in the administration building need to be friendlier. I am not the only one that feels this way! They always give you the run around." On the faculty side, one student wrote, "The teachers knew their teaching and did well in the classroom but didn't really care if we did well or not."

Other suggestions which were covered in 8%-9% of the recommendations related to more access to academic advising, more cultural and social events, and greater financial aid assistance. Next in line were the frequent favorites of more classes, lower tuition and more parking. A number of the miscellaneous responses related to making Boise State University a more traditional school by adding fraternities or actually reducing the number of non-traditional students as well as other sundry responses. Further details on themes can be found by studying Figure 3.

Grade point average and retention

Good grades, of course, are essential to meeting almost any educational objective. In addition, they can predict who will leave. As shown by Table 19, 65% of new freshmen had a grade point average that was 2.0 or better their first term. Almost 30% had grade point averages of over 3.0, indicating an excellent academic start. See Table 19 for details.

About 80% returned for spring semester, which has been typical for about the past five years. Table 19 shows the percentage of students at each GPA level who returned. It is obvious that

Category	No of Comments	Percent
No Suggestions/It's fine	47	21%
Registration assistance	24	11%
Be more student oriented	24	11%
More access to academic advisors	21	9%
Financial aid assistance	18	8%
More cultural & social events	19	8%
Miscellaneous	17	8%
Lower tuition	16	7%
Availability/better classes/instructors	13	6%
More parking	11	5%
Advertise more	8	4%
Change food service	4	2%
	222	100%

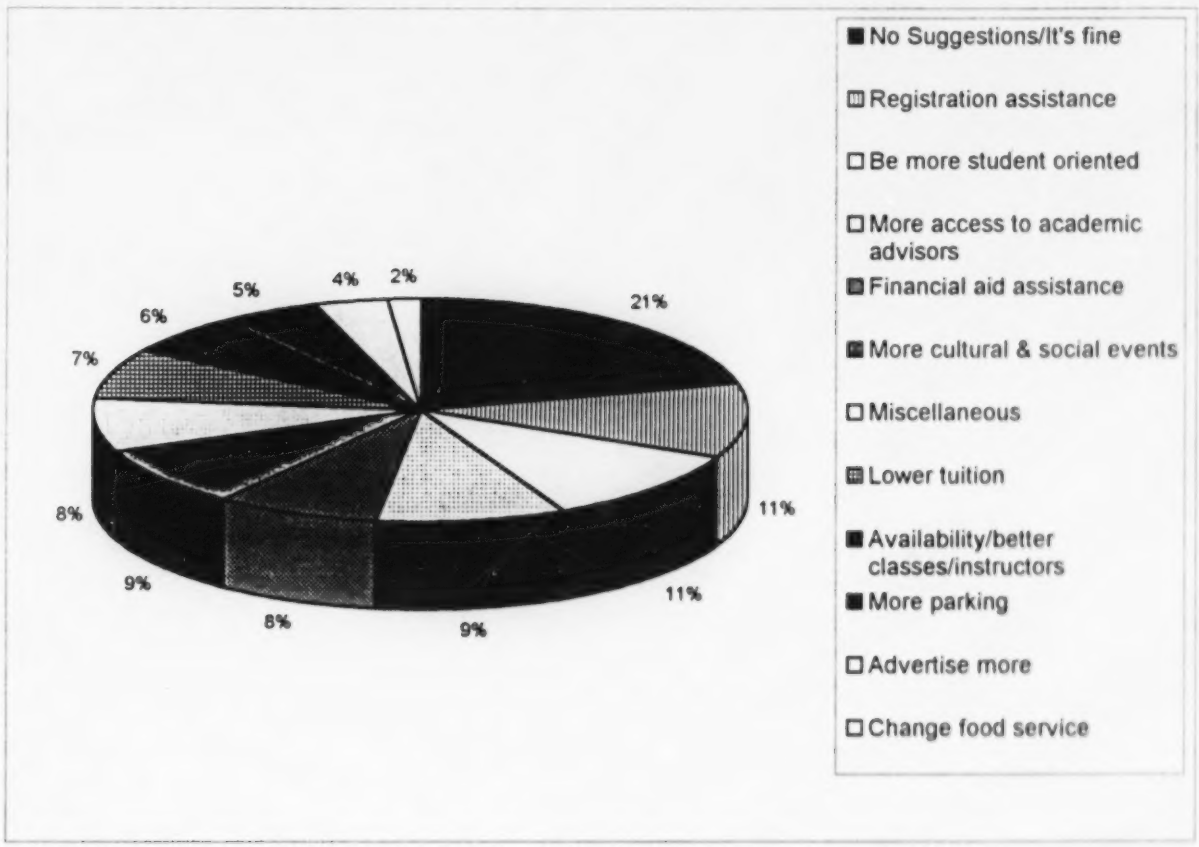

Figure 3. Responses to the Question, "What should BSU do differently to help students continue to enroll?"

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grade point average was related to continued enrollment. While about two-thirds of students who had grade point averages (GPAs) below 2.0 returned, this figure jumps to better than 90% for all

Table 19

First Term Grade Point Average's and Next Term Enrollment

Grade Point Average	*Number*	*% in that GPA Range*	*% Who Re-enrolled*
under 2.0	502	34.91	65.94
2.0 - 2.49	270	18.78	90.74
2.5 - 2.99	254	17.66	90.55
3.0 - 3.49	252	17.52	93.65
3.5 up	160	11.13	93.13
TOTAL	1438	100.00	82.82

Chi Square = 155.89, $p < .001$

students with GPAs above 2.0. Thus, this will be a key factor to consider in the further studies of retention and the impact of recent retention efforts.

Summary and Conclusions

Though the student body as a whole may not look very traditional, Boise State University's new freshman are more traditional than might be expected. Over 75% were under the age of 20, and 60% started full-time with 12 or more credits. Less traditional were their living arrangements. The new freshmen were fairly evenly divided between living on campus in the dorms, residing with their parents, and maintaining their own residence. About one in eight (or 12%) had children or elderly parents they needed to care for. A majority (59%) were working at least part-time and 12% were working full-time when they began school. About half were on financial aid.

With an average grade point average of 3.13, most arrived with grades indicating they were prepared for college. Test scores were also close to national averages with Boise State University students generally performing slightly better in mathematics than English. With cut scores for remedial work established by the University, however, about 12% needed English while 70%

needed mathematics help. This was due to the fact that mathematics had much more stringent cut scores at percentile ranges of 58-65, while English had a cut score at the 20th percentile.

Only about 70% of degree-seekers were planning on actually getting a degree from Boise State University. Most of the remainder (20%) planned to transfer while the other 10% had a variety of short-term goals including personal enrichment and upgrading their job skills. Most students started in Arts and Sciences, though about 13% or 222 students were there because they were undecided about their major. Other popular majors were General Business (140 majors), Elementary Education (89 majors), Psychology (58 majors), Criminal Justice (54 majors), Nursing (53 majors), Accounting (48 majors), Computer Science (43 majors), and Pre-Med (42 majors).

Almost everyone (98%) began by enrolling in at least one core course and one-fourth of new freshmen took only core courses. The most popular core courses were E101 and P101 with enrollments of 947 and 757 freshmen respectively. In addition, over 300 students elected to take a course that would help orient them to the University (over 100 in GE 108 and over 200 in GE 197 or First YES).

At the end of the term, most students thought Boise State University had an impact on their academic development. Highest on the list was writing skills, where 30% thought the University had a major impact and 75% thought the impact was either major or moderate. About 75% also thought the University had helped them make a commitment to lifelong learning either in a major (22%) or moderate (53%) way. Students thought the University had the least impact in helping them learn about career options.

The first semester was also a time of great personal development. In response to a question on what was the most important thing they had learned during the semester, over 70% of the responses indicated that students found this a time of increased self-awareness about who they were and what they needed to do to succeed in college. Many wrote about being on their own for the first time and what it meant to be a college student. Others mentioned improving their organizational, time management, and study skills. Still others discovered how to learn or the

simple joy of learning because they wanted to. The remaining comments dealt with learning about the institution (11%), academic subjects (9%), careers or majors (3%), or other miscellaneous things (6%).

Researchers such as Tinto (1987) have found that about academic integration and social integration were key determinants of whether a student will stay or leave an institution. Academic integration can be estimated from the student's academic performance as well as from the number and quality of faculty/staff interactions. Students who are socially integrated participate in extracurricular activities and have a variety of peer-group interactions. While these forms of integration may be less important at a largely commuter institution, the finding that students who form study groups are most likely to stay and succeed crosses institutional type.

Several measures were taken of academic integration. More than 75% of students indicated that they had held more than one conversation with faculty members. In addition, 86% agreed that they had generally experienced good teaching that semester. Only 62% agreed, however, that faculty members were genuinely interested in the welfare of students, while about 70% agreed that staff members had been helpful.

Perhaps the most important measure of academic integration, however, was Grade Point Average. About 65% had grade point averages above 2.0 at the end of their first semester. And this sharply distinguished between who returned for a second semester and who did not. Of those with a GPA below 2.0, 66% were back next semester compared to over 90% of those who had GPAs higher than this.

In the area of social integration, most students came out surprisingly high. Almost everyone had held conversations with other students; for almost 90%, these had occurred seven or more times. Over 75% had worked on projects outside of class with other students, and over 60% had met as a member of a study group. In terms of extracurricular activities, 44% participated in social

activities, 39% in recreational programs, and 24% in cultural programs and activities. Satisfaction ranged from 80% for recreational programs to 60% for cultural programs.

These data sketch a portrait of a freshman class that is in a learning and growing mode, fairly well-prepared, and confident of their chances for success at Boise State University. At the end of their first semester they were pretty pleased with their first semester and looking forward to further semesters at Boise State University. These data will now form the basis for two further studies. One will look generally at what predicts continued enrollment, focusing on the spring and following fall. The second will analyze the specific impacts, if any, of the First Year Experience course and the cluster program on grade point averages, continued enrollment, knowledge and use of resources, and perceptions of the University. As a group, these studies should help us gain further insight into the complex issue of retention at Boise State University.

Appendix A

New Student Survey
Opening Fall, 1995

Directions: The following survey has been designed to gain information about you as a student and the factors in your lif that may influence your continued enrollment at BSU. Please complete the survey and return it to your teacher. **Thoug we have asked for your name and ID number, no information about you as an individual will be reported to anyon** We simply need the information to match it to an additional survey you will be asked to complete at the end of the term an to check college records to see if you re-enroll next term. If you have questions about this process, please talk to you instructor or contact Dr. Marcia Belcher, Coordinator of Institutional Assessment, at extension 385-1117.

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Student ID Number: _ _ _ - _ _ - _ _ _ _ Major: _____ Code: ____

1. Is this your first term at BSU?	
①	Yes
②	No

2. Have you attended another college or university besides BSU?	
①	Yes
②	No

3. Why did you enroll at BSU? (select one)	
①	To earn a degree at BSU
②	To take some courses before I transfer elsewhere
③	To begin my college career before I take some time off (e.g., for mission work)
⑤	To upgrade skills needed for my job
⑥	For personal enrichment

4. How much time do you anticipate you will need to meet the educational goal you selected in #3 ?	
①	less than one year
②	1 year
③	2-3 years
④	4 years
⑤	5-6 years
⑥	7 years or more

5. Your success in college can be influenced by many factors. For each of the factors listed below, please rate yourself on whether you believe it will be a help or a hindrance during your college career. Use the following scale:

1 = This may be a significant hindrance
2 = This may be a minor hindrance
3 = This may be of some help
4 = This may be of great help

____	a. academic background
____	b. level of motivation
____	c. ability to plan and manage my time
____	d. the amount of time I can devote to school
____	e. ability to memorize
____	f. reading skills
____	g. note-taking skills
____	h. approach to test-taking
____	i. ability to think and reason
____	j. writing skills
____	k. ability to relate to others
____	l. mental and physical health
____	m. financial resources
____	n. ability to find and make use of BSU's resources
____	o. the support of my family and friends to get an education
____	p. maturity/age
____	q. love of learning
____	r. knowing what I want from my education at BSU

PLEASE TURN OVER →

End-of-Term New Student Survey
Fall, 1995

Directions: This survey has been designed to gain information about your experiences at BSU this term. Though we have asked for your social security number, no information about you as an individual will be reported to anyone. We simply need the information to match it to the survey you took at the beginning of the term and to check college records to see if you re-enroll next term. This information will be combined to produce a report on the entire group to help answer questions about how to better retain students. If you have questions about this process, please talk to your instructor or contact Marcia Belcher, Coordinator of Institutional Assessment, at 385-1117.

Social Security Number: _ _ _ - _ _ - _ _ _ _

Last Name _____ First Name _____

The following are a list of abilities or skills one might expect to develop while pursuing a post-secondary education. Please indicate the impact BSU has had on your development in each of these areas:

Major Impact ① Moderate Impact ② Minor Impact ③ No Impact ④

① ② ③ ④	1. Making and exercising a lifelong commitment to learning.
① ② ③ ④	2. Defining and solving problems.
① ② ③ ④	3. Developing skills that employers need.
① ② ③ ④	4. Learning about existing and emerging career options.
① ② ③ ④	5. Getting along with people from various cultures, races, backgrounds, etc.
① ② ③ ④	6. Recognizing and using effective oral communication skills.
① ② ③ ④	7. Recognizing and using effective written communication skills.
① ② ③ ④	8. Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data.

Indicate how you feel about each of the following statements.

Strongly Agree ① Agree ② No Opinion ③ Disagree ④ Strongly Disagree ⑤

① ② ③ ④ ⑤	9. BSU's environment is warm and friendly.
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	10. I am convinced I made the right decision in choosing BSU.
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	11. Faculty members are genuinely interested in the welfare of students.
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	12. Staff members have been helpful to me.
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	13. I generally experienced good teaching this semester.
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	14. I plan to re-enroll next semester.

(Please turn over) ➡